

Final White Paper

Topic: Identifying and documenting mid-level recruitment programs.

Issue: Due to increasing attrition rates of senior technical staff, a large percentage of Site Office positions are in need of both knowledge management and succession planning programs to ensure the continuity of DOE's mission. A long term strategy has been to identify entry level talent that could work along side experienced technical personnel to build the competencies necessary for our mission critical positions while filling forecasted skill gaps. As a result, Site Offices find it very difficult to identify a short term strategy that can identify and place new, mid-level employees into positions requiring the immediate application of mature technical skills.

Discussion: In the course of our research, the Federal Technical Capabilities Panel has reviewed six government hiring flexibilities programs that may could assist the FTCP's efforts in recruiting and acquiring mid-career to senior level talent: Schedule A hires for Persons with Disabilities, 30% Disabled Veterans, Veterans' Recruitment Appointment (VRA), OPM's Senior Fellows Program, the Student Career Employment Program, and OPM's Presidential Management Fellows Program.

First: The Schedule A program provides federal agencies the flexibility to hire persons with targeted disabilities at any grade level into an excepted service appointment, assuming the individual meets the position qualifications. A doctor or vocational rehabilitation center must certify the disability prior to hiring. After a period of two years service, agencies may non-competitively convert participants from excepted service to a competitive service appointment.

Second: The 30% Disabled Veterans program allows federal agencies to hire former veterans with a 30% disability rating from the Department of Veterans Affairs. Individuals may be hired at any grade level into an excepted service appointment. Agencies maintain the flexibility to non-competitively convert participants from excepted service to a competitive service appointment at any time following the initial appointment as there is not a mandatory waiting period prior to conversion. The appropriate review period prior to conversion is determined by the host agency.

Third: The Veterans' Recruitment Appointment Authority allows federal agencies to hire honorably discharged military veterans who are:

- Disabled veterans; or
- Veterans who served on active duty in the Armed Forces during a war, or in a campaign or expedition for which a campaign badge has been authorized; or
- Veterans who, while serving on active duty in the Armed Forces, participated in a United States military operation for which an Armed Forces Service Medal was awarded; or
- Recently separated veterans.

Individuals may be hired up to the GS-11 level into an excepted service appointment. After two years of satisfactory performance, agencies **must** non-competitively convert participants from the excepted service program to a competitive service appointment.

Fourth: OPM has also developed the Senior Fellows Program which they administer for the Federal Government. The guidance in Title V in the Code of Federal Regulations stipulates that agencies can make excepted service hires into a two-year developmental program at the GS-13 through GS-15 grade levels. Those individuals who complete the two year developmental program must be non-competitively converted into the competitive service.

Fifth: Next we reviewed the Student Career Experience Program. This program is designed to select college students to participate in a program that exposes them to real world applications of their field of study. Agencies must select students currently enrolled in classes for positions directly related to their field of study with the flexibility of non-competitive conversion to the competitive service following the completion of their degree and 640 hours of employment in the program. Historically, this program has been used to select traditional college students in their second or third year of undergraduate school for GS-4 positions related to their major. However, this program does not have a limit on the grade level that an individual can be hired so long as the individual is qualified for the job based on a combination of education and work experience.

Sixth: Lastly, we reviewed OPM's Presidential Management Fellows Program. This is a two-year excepted service hiring flexibility that allows agencies to hire individuals at the GS-9, 11, and 12 levels. All the participants are recruited, vetted, and chosen as finalists by OPM. All of the finalists have received a minimum of a Masters' degree in their chosen field of study. OPM selects 700-800 finalists based on agency hiring projections and the agency's articulation of the key fields where they are seeking to hire. Historically this program has selected primarily political scientists and public policy individuals. In recent years there has been a shift to select more scientists, engineers, and health care professionals in an effort to meet the government's increased need for these degree fields.

Recommendations:

1. The Schedule A appointment, while a viable option, would require very specific and very targeted relationship building efforts in an effort for FTCP to locate the unique technical expertise required to be hired and to hit the ground running. We recommend that this is a flexibility that should be further explored to better understand the demographic and vocational information about persons with disabilities. This will better help FTCP identify what are the best resources to find candidates within this community.
2. A VRA appointment also requires extremely targeted recruitment. FTCP believes developing relationships with the Department of Defense as well as veteran's affinity groups at the national, state, and local levels that are designed to develop

employment opportunities in technical fields for honorably discharged, retiring, or disabled veterans. However, the fact that the appointment is limited to the GS-11 may make this program less appealing than a Schedule A or 30 percent disabled veteran hire which does not carry any grade level restrictions.

3. The 30 percent disabled veteran program is yet another hiring program that requires a very targeted recruitment approach. Strong coordination would be needed between the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Department of Defense, as well as Army and Navy hospitals or disabled veteran affinity groups. Several programs are now sponsored by these organizations to allow veterans to serve as volunteers to federal agencies while on medical hold. Historically, many of the participants in the volunteer program are not fluent in the skills and expertise DOE needs for its technical workforce. While the FTCP endorses the use of the hiring flexibility, the program may not yield enough of the candidates we need for the technical and scientific positions we have available.
4. The Senior Fellows program is one of the most appealing options open to FTCP, however it is not a viable one. Despite its creation in the regulation, OPM has yet to develop the recruitment and selection processes for the program. In our conversations with OPM officials, there is a desire to begin the process of standing up the program, but there is uncertainty as to when or if a program can be implemented in the near future. However, once completed, OPM would conduct recruitment in various sectors for candidates to fill the Federal Government's mission critical positions in business and technology. FTCP should remain in contact with DOE HR liaisons in an effort to stay apprised of new updates regarding this program.
5. The Student Career Experience Program is another appealing option to the FTCP as well as being one of the most viable alternatives. Given the increasing percentage of non-traditional students and individuals going back to school as a result of the economic downturn, this program could potentially provide the FTCP with a flexibility to hire a seasoned employee currently seeking an advanced degree as well as hiring at a higher GS level. The challenges to this recommendation may be developing the recruitment strategy to find these non-traditional students in the job fields that we need. Additionally organizations like NNSA have proposed internal caps on the grade level at which an SCEP participant can be hired, which is a legitimate practice, but not a required one. That being said, other government organizations such as HHS have successfully utilized the SCEP flexibility as a mechanism to bring in more seasoned employees through an accelerated, but open and competitive process.
6. The Presidential Management Fellows Program is an additional option to FTCP that is both appealing and viable to meet our needs for developing a mid-career recruitment and development program. While FTCP would be limited to candidates that are named once a year similar to NNSA's Future Leader Program, the lead time will allow the FTCP to complete the necessary workforce planning

to determine what our needs may be on a yearly basis. The attractive flexibility in the program is the ability to hire at the GS-9, 11, and 12 or equivalent. In 2007 and 2008, DOE's headquarters HR office was able to work with organizations like EE, PI, and CF to identify and hire talent at both the GS-11 and GS-12 level for technical and business positions. FTCP recommends that we partner with headquarters HR, OPM, and other DOE organizations and contribute to OPM's recruitment process and work to encourage the use of the program at field locations.

Conclusion:

While there may not be a dedicated DOE program for external, seasoned, and mid-career individuals, there are at least two excepted service hiring flexibilities that FTCP can fully endorse: the Student Career Experience Program and the Presidential Management Fellows program. Both programs are currently in use within DOE and can lend themselves directly to hiring highly competitive, technically astute mid-career employees at the GS-11 through GS-13 levels with promotion potential to the GS-14/15 or equivalent. Additionally, the FTCP recommends further exploration of military veteran recruitment and hiring strategies or programs, potentially as part of FTCP's FY 2010 action plan, to determine the viability to meet FTCP's workforce planning and development initiatives.